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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on some common personality patterns and their influence on reading. Two commonly observed personality types, the compulsive and the hysterical, found at opposite ends of the continuum of personality patterns are discussed, and the types of children which result from parents with these personalities are described. It is noted that the classroom teacher is usually found near the compulsive end of the continuum. The relationship to reading instruction of children with personalities described as independent-compulsive, dependent-compulsive, dependent-hysterical, and independent-hysterical is discussed. References are included. (NH)

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SOME PERSONALITY FACTORS RELATING TO READING

RE002 850

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Introduction:

Although this session is listed under Intelligence and Reading, that most important topic will be discussed only in a passing way while discussing an even more important topic, personality patterns, reading instruction and reading as learning behavior.

Personality is something we all have, but how does it develop? For many years psychologists have felt that basic elements of personality were primarily inherited, however Dr. Freud's statements that personality was mostly learned and almost completely formed by the age of five or six years stimulated a large amount of investigation in which many researchers such as Cronbach (1), Milton (5), Owen (7) and Vale and Vale (13) verified that personality did form early, was learned and was mostly influenced in the home eg: Jones (4), Symonds (12) (6), Ribble (8) and Sears (9). Symonds also reviews researches done by many and concludes that activity levels, social responsiveness, self concept and ego strength were the learned behaviors in personality development.(11) While more hereditory factors might be present such as the physical ones like Sheldons morphology and temperament correlations (10), or glandular such as hyperthyroidism, this paper will focus on some common personality patterns often seen around us and how they might influence reading.

I would like to present a rather crude model that can illustrate how opposite types of personality patterns can develop and usually exist in the classroom. The strategies in teaching to these personality types is a major focus. The opposing types might best be understood in

the form of a large semi-circle representing a continuim from the extremely "Compulsive" side to the opposite end representing what we would label the extreme "Hysterical" type personality. The mid-point of this continuim would represent a neutral position or one of equal portions of both personality types and should be considered rather normal. For purposes of illustration, however, we should talk about personalities more toward each end of the continuim.

Compulsive Personality Types

This is a person you could characterize as "cellular" or "organized" or the typical "perfectionist." Every aspect of this person's life is usually planned, scheduled and routine. You can almost tell the time of day by his activities. His meals, his activities, his job are usually well organized and well planned. This personality type tends to be rather conservative in dress, authoritarian with children, and rigid about rules for himself as well as others. This is a person who must, above all, have planned a time slot for all the activities he is involved in. If not, anxiety forms,then if this stress continues,more permanent tension develops which tends to negate many kinds of learning. (3) (2) We frequently see indications of this personality type in teachers in classrooms. They tend to show many of the following signs:

They usually like to hold very close to a lesson plan. They do not deviate from it much and find it frustrating to improvise when the occasion demands. The more toward the extreme end they go the more rigidity is expressed. They like to lecture better than to discuss,

they prefer desks in a row, floors clean, and little talking. This personality type tends to gravitate toward the more specific or slower changing areas of curriculum such as the sciences, mathematics and the social sciences.

The Hysterical Personality Types

On the opposite end of the continuim we find a commonly occuring personality type which we should call the "Hysterical". In a word you could describe the life of this person as chaotic. He has all the best intentions but usually something always seems to change the priorities for the day's activities. This personality type may plan to teach with a lesson, well planned out, and then when a pupil asks a question the "hysterical" may leave the intended lesson and improvise a new one, keyed to the student's question. This type person tends to avoid schedules (to avoid anxiety) as much as possible and in many cases tries to destroy or nullify the scheduling activities with which he comes in contact. This type person might well plan to wash the car on a regular basis such as every Saturday, however three or four weeks might slip by until finally this person goes out to wash the car, at which time he impulsively also vacuums the car, waxes it, cleans the chrome and then vows that from now on he'll wash the car every week but.....three weeks later.

Personality Types and Child Rearing.

So far we have discussed some commonly observed adult personality patterns. These same patterns of life also tend to be applied to the children in immediate families. A compulsive parent who wants a well organized household tends to organize the behavioral patterns of the children as well. There are usually well enforced rules and regulations which have been imposed on the child since early childhood. The eating, work, rest and recreation patterns are usually well organized, routine or non-existent. The child rom a very early age is plugged into the family activities and need not or even dare not question these rules or behavior patterns. From this type family two readily observable personality variations can be seen. They both are still "compulsive" types but differ greatly from each other. One is called the Independent Compulsive and the other the Dependent Compulsive. The Independent Compulsive is almost the image of the compulsive parent. He tends to be somewhat brighter, more verbal (especially with adults) and seeks to do his own organizing and planning for his interests. This type child very often becomes the rebel at adolescense since his structure and the parents structure often run into conflict with each other.

The dependent-compulsive type child tends to be more withdrawn, passive and less verbal, but responds to well organized, routine and specific goal directed learning. He has usually been dominated, subjugated or manipulated by the family which tends to be more authoritarian than the family which produced the Independent Compulsive.

Two types of "hysterical" personalities can develop. Again they conform to the general hysterical patterns but also are of Independent

and Dependent types. The Independent-Hysterical tends to be brighter, more verbal, usually has had substantial contact with different familial life styles and has been able to adapt himself to the chaotic nature of his surroundings. He tends to be a highly sensitive and moralistic type. This has its foundations in the chaotic non-consistent type of early-childhood which resulted in a child who wants to know the answers to the riddle of life. This questioning and sensitiveness to everyone and everything will usually stay with the Independent-Hysterical throughout his life.

The Dependent-Hysterical also has his roots in the chaos of the non-structural family, however he has not been able to see any patterns to life and thus he becomes quite fearful of it. As a result, he begins to shrink from the reality of life and withdraws from it into his own dream-world. A large percentage of psychotic children could come from this personality type.

Personality Types and Teachers.

All of the personality types discussed are easily seen in the classroom if one observes them closely, however there is always one that is not easily observed. It is the personality type of the teacher. More important is how it influences the type of instruction given and the responses expected from children. The majority of classroom teachers by the very process of having to pursue the many years of school and college in order to become teachers, usually have to fall somewhat past

the center of the continuim toward the "Compulsive" side. This teacher quite often perpetuates this cycle by giving instruction in such a way that the compulsive child is more easily rewarded and thus becomes the successful student on his way to higher education.

The individual differences in personality of children is just as important as the differences of intelligence, language or experience.

Personality and Reading Instruction.

Since personality permeates every action and every aspect of our lives, it is only natural that it should affect learning and the way youngsters learn to read.

For the Independent-Compulsive, the child is the organizer (and the manipulator) of his school environment. When a teacher is not specific or directive enough, this child will tend to organize the situation through questions or subtle statements. He generally is quite verbal and with a compulsive teacher he is considered a good student. The deficiencies, however, are ones of; lack of decision making abilities, lack of creative initiative and some loss of aesthetic appreciation (such as literature or poetry appreciation) in the language-arts. If placed in a non-directed or qualitative situation, anxiety can produce a lack of learning or even an inability to use previous learning. More explicity, the gap between what he prefers (well-organized, routines) and what he needs (more flexibility and adaptability) can be filled with activities such as language-experience activity,

literature appreciation, creative writing activities, contextual vocabulary, etc., and should produce good tolerance of less rigid aspects of this world.

For the dependent-compulsive child, however, things are quite different. This personality has been controlled and manipulated during his early life to the extent that he wants to be told how, when or what to do and in what way and order it should be done. Again this knowledge gives us the strategy for instruction. This child should be given as much structure as is necessary to allow the youngster to succeed but always moving past the threshold toward more decision making, more responsibilities, more iniative and especially toward more self-directed activities.

Specifically these might be such activities as: concrete comprehension skill activities that become more abstract. Art work as a comprehension technique. Specific vocabulary meanings moving toward multiple meanings which he must create. Deciding how long a research report should be. Making outlines, summaries, of books he has liked, etc.

The independent-hysterical child has managed to develop a personality that helps him cope with very chaotic situations, to improvise, to desire learning about everything, but he quite often is deficient in the organizational patterns of learning and in the endurance or diligence necessary to stay with a dull or routine (to him) but necessary activity.

Quite often this personality type gets over-involved in too many activities to do justice to any of them. This information should lead us to teaching strategies that permit creativeness and iniative but

also insist on some acceptance of highly structured less interesting, drill-type or time consuming long term projects that cannot be completed at one sitting. These can be accomplished by involvement of the child in creative writing or research projects that have many sub-parts and demand much revision or rewriting. Art projects, phonics skills, vocabulary building and spelling exercises provide the routine and more structured activities that will build more tolerance of the structure that is needed.

The remaining personality type, the <u>dependent-compulsive</u> is perhaps the most difficult to work with because of the basic shyness and withdrawn character. This child will not pursue learning but will day-dream, attempt to escape the learning situation by crying, avoiding or just plain sitting and waiting for teacher. He usually likes to draw, tell tall tales, to sing or play music, and these activities can usually be used as motivators for learning other things. It is very important for this child to have very personal instruction as he feels more confident and responds very well to this type of approach. This fact explains some of the dramatic increases that result when youngsters are placed in remedial reading (one-to-one or very small groups). The specific skills in reading will respond more quickly, and when building confidence is a major goal. Therefore a balance between skill building that is routine and therefore less frightening, plus involvement in more game type and motivating type activities to reach the less concrete or apparent reading skills is necessary.

While this paper has tried to relate how personalities of both teacher and pupil are related to reading and learning, the author would be the first to say that this model presented a nice, neat, concise description of some obvious types of personality differences. In actuality these types are never pure and the multiplicity of variables that affect personality development such as the first-born child vs. the baby of the family - two radically different personality types in the home, traumatic shocks in early life such as divorce, deaths, severe physical illness, mental illness, can never be static. Walter Mischel states it very well when he says, "We need to recognize that discontinuities .... are a part of the genuine phenomena of personality." (6)

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